



# H Street NE Strategic Development Plan

## PURPOSE & ROLES

The H Street NE Strategic Development Plan will guide community, private sector, and public agency actions and investments in revitalizing this traditional neighborhood corridor over the next ten years. The Plan emerged from community input about market analysis, neighborhood assets, transportation objectives, and current and proposed land uses. Over 500 stakeholders - including residents, merchants, property owners, District agencies and investors - participated in developing this Plan.

Various area stakeholder groups are expected to play a crucial role in shepherding the Plan through its many levels of implementation. Key roles must be played by both **ANC 6A and 6C** to pro-actively encourage continued economic and physical development consistent with the overall goals of the Plan, particularly regarding issues of zoning; by the **H Street NE Main Street** in leading community efforts to resolve cleanliness and safety issues on the corridor and to work for the community in retaining, expanding and attracting preferred retailers; by the **H Street CDC** in developing/redeveloping their properties in accordance with the tenets and guidelines of the Plan; by **local merchants** in meeting the new and ongoing demand for quality goods and services at competitive prices; by **area residents** in holding public and private agencies and officials accountable and by participating in ANC and Main Street committee meetings, projects and activities; by **private developers/investors** by adhering to the Plan's recommendations; and by **public agencies** in continuing to work with the H Street stakeholders to facilitate more investment. The Plan calls for many tiers of participation and investment. The Plan is not intended for the sole use of any one organization.

## SYNOPSIS

There are surmountable challenges and numerous opportunities for re-investment on H Street NE. H Street has considerable potential to be revitalized as a neighborhood serving commercial corridor and as a thriving residential district with some cultural offerings.

The overarching vision is an H Street NE that offers diverse retail goods and services and provides cultural and housing opportunities while strengthening the corridor's competitive advantage and image and conveying its unique history. Priority is given to transit and pedestrian movement, parking is managed and expanded, and transit service is enhanced through a proposed trolley line.

The Plan recommends four (4) thematic areas which build upon existing assets and provide different amenities to the community and visitors:

- Western Gateway: Urban Living with Retail Support**  
(North Capitol to 7th Street NE)
- Central Retail District**  
(7th Street to 12th Street NE)
- Eastern Gateway: Arts & Entertainment District**  
(12th Street to Bladensburg Ave NE)
- Hechinger Mall / Old Sears Site**  
(Bladensburg Avenue to 17th Street NE)

As the corridor revives and in each thematic area, it will continue to be very important that stakeholders remain focused on achieving "realistic" goals.

## PROJECT BOUNDARIES AND GOALS

The Project Area extends from North Capitol Street to 17th Street NE, just beyond the Hechinger Mall. Within this zone, the corridor is approximately 1.5 miles in length and is 13 blocks lined by a mixture of hair salons, barber shops, fast food carry outs, local clothiers, some national chains, local churches, significant vacant land, abandoned buildings and underutilized upper floors.

The challenge from the H Street communities to the District was to produce a preferred mix of diverse uses and retail goods and services. Community goals in this planning effort are:

- (1) To provide vital information and expert recommendations **to help existing businesses** to grow and thrive on H Street NE;
- (2) To recommend a realistic strategy for encouraging the **reuse of the numerous vacant lots and storefronts** on the corridor to create a desirable mix of commercial offerings on the corridor;
- (3) To assist in determining the public investment needed to **improve the infrastructure and physical appearance** of the corridor; and
- (4) To improve the physical and market perception of the corridor to **attract shoppers, tourists, residents, visitors, and private investors**.



## MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Though there is significant redevelopment potential on H Street, "real" expectations must be maintained about H Street given the following:

- A. 1.5 miles of successful retail on H Street is unrealistic over a 10 year planning horizon (perhaps longer);
- B. Shopping habits have changed. Few customers are willing to walk 1.5 miles for basic goods and services;
- C. Quality urban retailers locate where there is active foot traffic of those with income virtually guaranteed on the corridor; and
- D. H Street is within a very "urban" location, and there are responsibilities (perhaps some inconveniences) that all must share for the larger success.

The H Street plan accepts these conditions and provides the following direction:

- A. Some retail uses are too redundant.
- B. The current demographic is strong enough to support vibrant retail, but will not support 1.5 miles of thriving retail;
- C. As a single destination, the corridor is too long and, rather, should have clear themes that describe the kinds of preferred development and uses while supporting a central retail district; and
- D. Introducing housing on H Street will make retail retention and attraction less difficult.



## OVERARCHING PUBLIC POLICY

Several District-wide policies and initiatives have been factored into the planning process for H Street. Those policies and initiatives include:

- A. **reSTORE DC** - A partnership between the District government and local community organizers to revitalize the District's neighborhood business districts through a comprehensive and systemic strategy for retention and attraction of preferred neighborhood uses;
- B. **Strategic Neighborhood Investment Program (SNIP)** - A targeted investment policy wherein priority District neighborhoods or locations receive a series of comprehensive public actions or funds to complement and/or catalyze private sector investment;
- C. **Transit Enhancements** - A preliminary and ongoing assessment of potential corridors and routes for expansion of the District's mass transit network;
- D. **Transit Oriented Development** - A smart growth management strategy wherein the District actively seeks simultaneously to capitalize upon its transit and high-volume corridors to enhance existing neighborhood centers by creating active and compact neighborhood development opportunities;
- E. **Parking Demand Management** - A policy that focuses on creating livable neighborhoods while supporting successful retail through efficient management of parking demand and resources that may include creative pricing strategies, shared parking, municipal parking, shuttle and transit



programs, and flexible design; and

F. **Housing and Re-population** - A policy directive to recapture a portion of the 300,000 citizens lost over the last three decades and to enhance the District's human capital by creating and rehabilitating housing for a wide spectrum of individuals and families.

H Street NE is one of many District locations where all the above policies and initiatives converge.





## KEY ISSUES

### LAND USE, ZONING & DEVELOPMENT

- Potential redevelopment, repositioning opportunities at both of the gateway locations, the Hechinger Mall area at the eastern gateway and the 3rd and H intersection at the western gateway;
- Recommendations for site assemblage (to accommodate new uses), historic preservation and selective demolition;
- Recommendations for new land uses and/or zoning modifications;
- Building design and development guidelines for new construction and preservation properties; and
- Role of housing.



### RETAIL ENVIRONMENT

- Diversification of the retail mix;
- Strategies for marketing the corridor to new retail users;
- Strategies for encouraging revitalization activities along the corridor, i.e. tax increment financing district, HUB and Enterprise zone benefits, etc.;
- Strategies for capacity building of corridor merchants and property owners, i.e. Business Improvement Districts (BID) or others; and
- Small business incubators, cultivation of local entrepreneurs.



### TRANSIT/TRAFFIC/PARKING

- Recommendations for parking and traffic/transportation management; and
- Assess impact of light rail transit on corridor on parking, land uses and zoning.

### PUBLIC REALM

- Public realm guidelines for streetscapes;
- Safety on sidewalks, street crossings, and for businesses; and
- Public gathering places (i.e. sidewalk cafés, particularly side streets).



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Location:

The Hopscotch Bridge connects the H Street NE commercial district to the Downtown. The area around the eastern landing of the bridge and the area around the intersection of H Street NE with Florida Avenue are gateways. Both gateways are currently underdeveloped and represent significant opportunities.

### Properties:

There are approximately 230 commercial and retail buildings on H Street NE and an additional 54 vacant parcels. Roughly 30% of storefronts are vacant while 47% of upper floors are vacant. These vacancies contribute to perceptions of the area as unwelcoming and unsafe. The use of solid security grates and unshielded security lighting further reinforces perceptions of the corridor as a risky place for investment.

With the notable exception of a half dozen sites, the size and depth of parcels limits their attractiveness to investment and redevelopment. Typical modern commercial buildings, especially office and mixed-use buildings, require a much larger footprint than is possible on a small, shallow site. In addition, there are multiple owners along H Street NE, few who own many contiguous properties, which poses additional challenges to redevelopment.

### Transportation:

Auto and mass transit travel is heavy on the corridor. Over 24,000 auto trips are made along the H Street corridor daily. Bus service is provided by the east-west X2 buses which carry over 18,000 passengers per day while the north-south 92 bus route which crosses H Street on 8th Street carries an additional 17,000 passengers per day. The western gateway of the corridor is also within walking distance of the Union Station metro station and regional train service.

### Parking:

Parking is severely constrained. At present, H Street provides 336 on-street parking spaces, however, parking is prohibited on the in-bound and out-bound side during rush hour. Only 850 off-street parking spaces exist, and of these, only 110 are for public use. 1,387 parking spaces are available at Union Station, with an additional 1,200 more planned.

### Retail Environment:

H Street's present retail mix includes fast food and carry-out restaurants, beauty salons, barbershops, convenience stores, small clothiers, and specialty shops. Some businesses have been in operation for generations

while others are newly opened on the corridor. Retail consultants found a strong consumer base for hair and nail salons and moderate-priced clothing stores. The corridor currently has sufficient take-away food, convenience stores, and pharmacy establishments to satisfy demand. Though desired by the community, retail experts believe it may be difficult for the corridor to support art galleries or antique shops, movie theatres, and another full-scale grocery store (a Safeway currently operates in the Hechinger Mall). In addition, H Street merchants face tough competition from nearby destinations like Union Station, Hechinger's Mall, Downtown/Chinatown and Eastern Market.

### Historic Resources:

H Street NE has many examples of historic architecture that are worthy of preservation, however there are also a number of blocks where the historic integrity of the area has been severely compromised. Major historic landmarks should be preserved and used as opportunities to anchor new development, while blocks with less historic integrity allow opportunities for land assembly and new infill development. The overall historic character, feel, and identity of the corridor is a tremendous asset and should be preserved and built upon. With minor exceptions, no formal controls or incentives exist to ensure that the corridor's historic buildings are preserved and that new buildings be designed to relate well to their surroundings.

### Market conditions:

The market study of the neighborhood indicates that 1) demand in the core service area (Map 2) does support greater quality and diversity of shopping opportunities along the corridor; 2) demand is projected to grow over the next 10 years; and 3) demand is not sufficient to support continuous retail frontage along the entire corridor.

### Existing commercial space

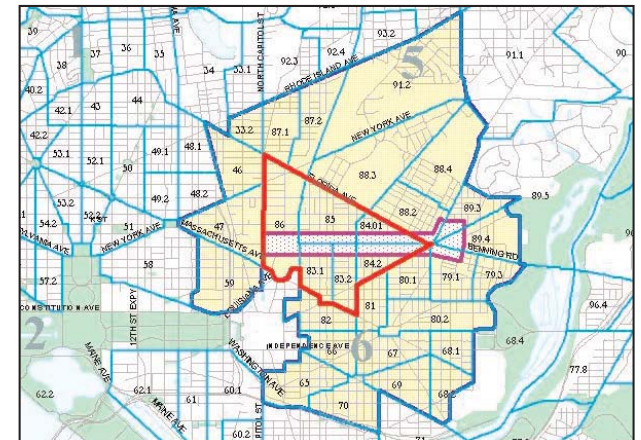
Total existing floor area (all floors) - H Street only = 1,281,928 sq. ft.  
Total existing floor area (all floors) - H and Hechinger's = 1,495,782 sq. ft.  
Total existing storefront area (1st floor) - H Street only = 495,836 sq. ft.  
Total occupied storefront area (1st floor) - H Street only = 369,107 sq. ft.

**Supportable commercial space = 300-350,000 sq.ft.**

Given these findings, retail uses will likely not extend the entire length of the H Street corridor and will need to be guided strategically for maximum success. In addition, H Street must compete with other local retail areas including Downtown, Chinatown, Pennsylvania Avenue, Massachusetts Avenue and Union Station.



400 Block architectural heritage on H Street.



H Street NE Primary & Secondary Market Map



## H STREET STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK

### Public Realm:

H Street NE will primarily be a transit and pedestrian corridor, however auto traffic can and will continue to move through the corridor calmly and efficiently. A consistent streetscape will tie the corridor together and improve the pedestrian environment. Measures must be taken to improve cleanliness and safety along the corridor.

### Transportation:

An enhanced transit service on H Street - potentially bus rapid transit (BRT) or light-rail transit (LRT), similar to a modernized trolley service - will serve the H Street corridor and connect it to Georgetown, Woodley Park and the Minnesota Avenue metro station. Parking will be shared and managed through parking demand management. On-street parking will be permitted without rush-hour limitations and traffic speeds will be slowed and smoothed through traffic calming measures. The complicated intersection at Bladensburg, Florida, H Street, and Maryland will be improved to enhance safe pedestrian, transit, and vehicular movement.

### Retail Development:

Analyses of the market for retail uses indicate that within 10 years, the area will support approximately 300,000 square feet of retail of the type and variety desired by neighborhood residents and capable of attracting investment in new and existing buildings. While not enough to fill all storefronts along the corridor, the projected demand is strong enough to spark the revitalization of retailing in the center of the corridor and complementary retail at the western and eastern gateways. Ground floor spaces outside the areas targeted for retail revitalization may include professional offices, studio spaces, and residential uses.

**Office Development.** For office uses, the market analyses suggest the corridor can capture approximately 175,000 square feet space suited for small professional, non-profit, and association offices. While it may be difficult to attract developers of large scale, Class A offices like those located downtown, developers of smaller-scale projects should find H Street NE to be an attract, highly accessible location.

### Housing:

H Street will become a living corridor with upwards of 750 new or rehabbed residential uses along it. Residential uses will add needed support to the retail on the corridor and provide additional "eyes and feet on the street" to improve safety, security and retail viability.

## DISSECTING THE PLAN

### Western Gateway: Urban Living with Retail Support:

Extending from North Capitol Street to roughly 7th Street NE, the Gateway area emphasizes residential uses by capitalizing on its location within an easy walk of transit and opportunities for infill development. Housing will be higher density with architecture that appropriately marks the entrance to the H Street community. Limited ground floor retail such as dry cleaners, lunch counters, and some restaurants will support the demands of the new and existing residential and nearby office uses. Supportable retail in this area is estimated at 5,000 - 20,000 square feet.

Key actions to guide revitalization of this district include:

*Strongly encourage residential development with supportive retail that serve area residents and others from nearby offices and other uses*

*Change zoning to maximize the benefit of proximity to significant transit and to create density that will help to make retail development more feasible.*

*Change zoning to permit larger in-fill residential or mixed-use buildings on the 200 and 300 blocks and include incentives for residential development.*

*Rezone the 200 and 300 blocks in such a way that developers would undergo the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process to achieve higher densities and to allow more design input and review.*

*Preserve the Capital Children's Museum building. It is an excellent candidate for applying the historic preservation tax credits and any developers should be encouraged to take advantage of the credit to preserve the building.*

*If the Capital Children Museum remains at its current location, the site should be*

*redeveloped to incorporate residential and/or some small office uses and parking.*

*If the Capital Children Museum should relocate, then redevelop the entire site to include residential and parking.*

*Set minimum construction FAR of usable floor area within zero lot line development*

*Encourage second floor office uses with residential above in order to generate both daytime and nighttime activity*

*Provide financial tools to enable development of mixed use multifamily projects*

*Preserve the 400 block north and south side, 500 block north side*

*Redevelop 501 H Street with a mix of uses on multiple floors*

*Redevelop the Murry's grocery store site with a mix of uses to possibly include an improved or better quality neighborhood grocer; incorporate municipal parking*

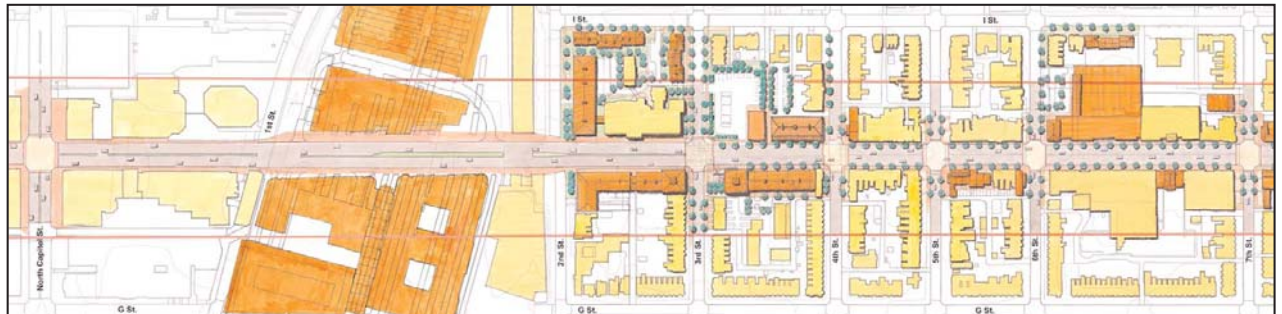
*Work with developer of Union Station Air Rights to coordinate programming for uses in proposed construction with H Street retail*

*Front Union Station Air Rights project(s) onto H Street NE; have H Street address*

**LONG TERM:** Redevelop the H Street Self Storage with a mix of uses and in accordance with the above guidelines include some municipal parking in redevelopment

### WESTERN GATEWAY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Retail	5 - 10,000 SF
Housing	500 - 600 units
Office	100,000 SF



### Central Retail District:

The area from 7th Street to 12th Street is envisioned as the centralized "downtown" of the H Street community. Retail uses will be strengthened, consolidated, and diversified here to offer residents, shoppers, and visitors the range of goods and services they seek. Housing and small office uses will be encouraged on the upper floors and the historic character will be preserved. Parking will be enhanced by removing the on-street parking restrictions and identifying opportunities for structured parking to serve this district. Retail support will be greatest here with 150,000 - 200,000 square feet of retail concentrated in this area.

#### Key actions to guide implementation in this district include:

Encourage infill construction up to full allowable zoning limits (2.5 FAR, 50 feet height limit, 60% occupancy).

Set minimum construction FAR of usable floor area within zero lot line development.

Require retail first floor uses of complementary uses.

Provide zoning and financial incentives for development of mixed use multifamily projects.

Allow shared parking management strategy to offset onsite parking requirements.

Preserve the historic commercial character of the H Street Corridor through compatible infill design.

Investigate landmarking the Old McCrory's site at H and 12th Streets, the Douglas Memorial Church at 11th and H Streets, the former Home Savings Northeast Branch Bank at 720-722 H Street and the former Northeast Savings Bank at 800 H Street NE.

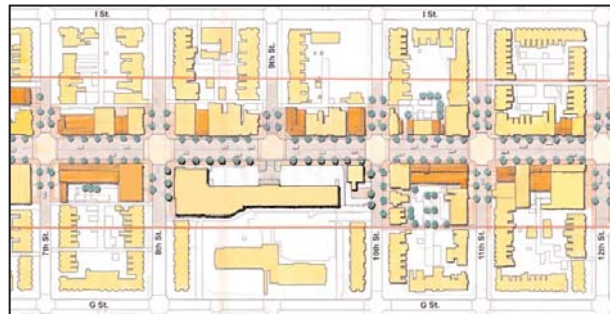
Significant opportunity development sites exist: 700 block south side (eastern ½ only), 700 block north side (western ½ block), 1000 block south side (1017 - 1025 H Street only).

Concentrate neighborhood-serving retail retention, attraction and re-positioning efforts in this sector.

Target modest priced women's and children's everyday clothing stores, a new and/or used bookstore, at least one quality neighborhood sit down restaurant, a coffee shop/diner.

Limit attraction of new convenience stores, hair salons, and barber shops.

**LONG TERM:** Redevelop the H Street Connection with a mix of uses and in accordance with the above guidelines include some municipal parking in redevelopment.



#### CENTRAL RETAIL DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Retail	120 - 200,000 SF
Housing	100 units
Office	50,000 SF

#### EASTERN GATEWAY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Retail	15 - 40,000 SF
Housing	100 units
Office	50,000 SF



### Eastern Gateway Arts & Entertainment District:

Building off the existing assets of the Atlas Theatre, H Street Playhouse and R.L. Christian Library, the area from 12th to 15th Street will provide art, entertainment and cultural activities to the residents and visitors of H Street. These cultural activities will be supported by complementary retail uses such as sit-down restaurants, art galleries, art related retail, and other community services. Residential and office uses will be encouraged on upper-floors that provide opportunities for live-work space for artists, performers, and professionals. Retail support in this area is around 15,000 - 20,000 square feet.

#### Key actions to guide implementation in this district include:

Build off of success of H Street Playhouse and potential success of Atlas Theater.

Encourage infill development.

Encourage construction and rehabilitation up to full allowable zoning limits (2.5 FAR, 50 feet height limit, 60% occupancy).

Set minimum construction FAR of usable floor area within zero lot line.

Require retail first floor uses with strong emphasis on specialty retail, dining and entertainment-destination uses.

Provide financial incentives for development of mixed use projects.

Preserve the 1200 block north side, 1300 block north and south side, 1400 block south side.

Build a better R. L. Christian Library facility with better services and programming.

As feasible, provide municipal parking either on the 1200 block south side or by land assemblage, within the 1300 block south side.

Alternatively, construct a mixed use retail + residential facility on the 1200 block south side - encourage artist - live work units.

Rehabilitate vacant buildings including upper floors for usage as specialty retail, dining, entertainment and arts-related uses above.

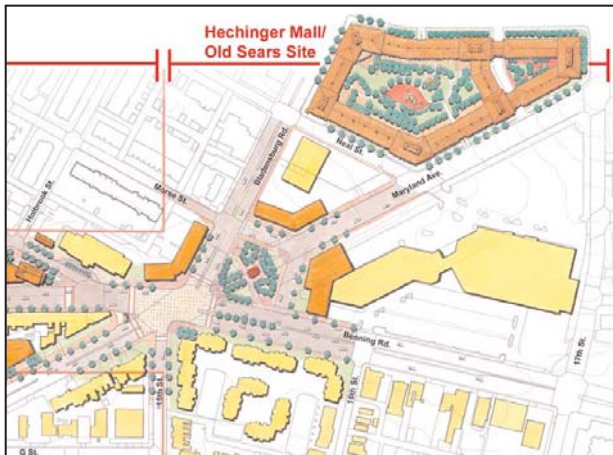
### **Hechinger Mall / Old Sears Site:**

No decision about the two potential uses of the 5-acre Old Sears Site has been made. Potential uses include either a large format big box retailer or 50 units per acre of residential development. There are pros and cons to both options. However, whatever decision is made will have some impact on achieving a vibrant and thriving H Street. A large format retail use may help the District to retain retail sales that currently leak out into surrounding jurisdictions, and it might bring more people through the H Street corridor therefore providing more visibility to local retailers. Housing may generate additional customers for H Street businesses, but they would not be the immediate customers that businesses prefer.

#### **Key actions to guide implementation in this district include:**

*Encourage construction and rehabilitation up to full allowable C-3-A zoning limits (4.0 FAR, 65 feet height limit, 75% occupancy for residential).*

*Work with owner and developer to development a mixed use project which might include both retail and housing.*



### **OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Transportation, Transit, Traffic and Parking**

*Implement new planning process focused on re-prioritizing H Street to be a transit and pedestrian corridor with retail parking - cover transit, pedestrian and bicycle access, streetscaping, parking and vehicle movement.*

*Eliminate the rush hour parking restrictions.*

*Expand and enhance the level of transit service on H Street; actively encourage greater usage.*

*Encourage BRT / LRT service on H Street.*

*Consider potential BRT / LRT stations/stops on the apex of the Hopscotch Bridge, 4th and H Street NE, 8th and H Street NE, 12th and H Street NE, and 15th and Benning Road NE.*

*Incorporate public parking as a use within a redeveloped Murry's site, H Street Connection site, 1300 block interior south side.*

*Develop parking agreement with Union Station for Western Gateway uses.*

*Maintain as much on-street parking as possible.*

*Incorporate truck loading zoning strategically into the parking plan while minimizing the need for double parking of trucks.*

*Discourage parking in neighboring residential areas.*

*Re-time all street light to control the flow of traffic through the corridor.*

*Improve pedestrian crossings and vehicular flow at the intersection of H Street NE, Bladensburg, Maryland, Benning Road and 15th Street (Five Points).*

#### **The Public Realm**

*Explore the establishment of an H Street historic preservation district.*

*Widen H Street sidewalks as possible.*

*Install new sidewalks and streetscaping (trees, pedestrian scale lighting, street signage, etc.)*

*Provide parallel on-street parking.*

*Provide sufficient bike rack facilities.*

*Install stop lights at all intersection and provide safe pedestrian crossings.*

*Encourage development of outdoor dining activities on wider intersecting sidewalks.*

*Provide signage to local points of interest (i.e. Gallaudet University, Northeast Branch library, neighborhood schools, etc.)*

*Invite heritage-based tourism industry to develop programs for H Street.*

*Consider a complete survey of historic sites along H Street.*

*Continue to investigate the opportunity of a Business Improvement District (BID) to include H Street.*

### **NEXT STEPS AND CONTACT INFORMATION**

These recommendations are still being developed and expanded upon. The Office of Planning has been working with key District agencies and the H Street Main Street group throughout this process. That will continue. OP and the consultant team have to present this report and findings to the District's full H Street Interagency Task Force for their comments and suggestions. The purpose of those meetings is to garner implementation support from District agencies.

#### **The following meetings are being scheduled:**

1. Follow Up Draft Recommendations & Design Guidelines Presentation (January 30, 2003)
2. Final Presentation (late February 2003)
3. DDOT H Street Transportation, Transit, Parking & Streetscape Study (early 2003)
4. DC Public Library - R. L. Christian Library Programming and Services Community Meeting (early 2003)

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